

Towards A More Perfect Union: Making Life Easier in a Joint Environment

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Towards A More Perfect Union:  
Making Life Easier in a Joint Environment

Submitted to:  
Major George Schreffler, III  
Major Rodney Tatum

by

Captain Bryan Blair, USA

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Joint and individual service doctrine not only contemplate, but also call for the joint employment of units at the tactical level.<sup>1</sup> The command relationships, such as OPCON and TACON, are well defined, but this academic delineation does not of itself prepare a battalion task force to serve with a sister service. In theory, the Joint Forces Component Commander could rearrange the structure of his subordinate commands as easily as rearranging Lego® blocks. In reality, much could (and should) be done by the respective services at an institutional level to ensure that these "Lego® blocks" fit together better. To facilitate future joint employment of tactical units, the Marine Corps and the Army need to change the way their forces are supplied and trained.

#### Background/ Joint Employment

In July 1941, the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Brigade (Provisional) was deployed to aid British forces in the defense of Iceland.<sup>2</sup> As the Marines were later relieved by Army forces, a transition period existed in which the Marines were "detached for service to the Army." This meant that they fell under the complete control of the Army commander, including administrative and judicial matters. The ensuing complications helped to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this discussion, tactical ground units are defined as units at the brigade level and below.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Frank O. Hough, Major Verle E. Ludwig, and Henry I. Shaw, *FMFRP 12-34-I History of the United States Marine Corps Operations in World War II: Pearl Harbor to Guadalcanal, Volume I* (Quantico, Virginia: US Marine Corps, 1989), ###

that it was the last time a Marine unit was attached to an Army command.<sup>3</sup> Throughout WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and the Cold War, the separate services operated in spite of each other rather than in conjunction with each other. However, the fallout from fumbled operations in Grenada and the Iranian desert, along with other mounting bureaucratic problems/issues, led to a more concerted effort to coordinate the joint employment of forces.

In fact, almost twenty years ago, the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 attempted to address many of these problems, but the bill's sponsors prudently recognized that legislation alone would not be sufficient.<sup>4</sup> However, as a result of the DRA, the services did begin to cooperate at the highest levels. The fruits of this effort were first seen in Operation Desert Storm when the Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> "Tiger" Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, was temporarily spared from deactivation to see combat in Kuwait under control of Marine forces. Since then, there have been many more examples of units at brigade and below employed under joint command. In Somalia, the Balkans, and into the Global War on Terrorism, Marine and Army units have increasingly operated jointly. In all of these recent cases, the respective units fought well, earning numerous unit

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<sup>3</sup> Marine units were also attached to the Army in WWI with similar difficulties.

<sup>4</sup> United States Senate Committee on Armed Services. Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986: Report to Accompany S.2295 Together with Additional Views. (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1986), 11

citations. However, unnecessary internal friction that is best addressed at the institutional level did occur.

### Supplying the Joint Force

Inherent to the different levels of command relationships are the respective levels of logistic support that the gaining unit is responsible for providing to the receiving unit. Under the supervision of the combatant commander, each service is responsible for the logistic support of its units within the theater. This may appear sensible to service level planners who are concerned with tracking the expenditure of "green" and "blue" dollars to bill each service for its respective consumption. In reality, this creates an inefficient system in which detached units must stretch their logistics train back to their parent unit for support while they are TACON or OPCON to another service unit.<sup>5</sup>

This situation is further exacerbated by the increasing disparity between the equipment found in Army and Marine units. For example, the Marines and the Army both use the Abrams main battle tank, but differing visions of the role of armored units has the Army fielding the M1A2 SEP, while the Marines are fielding the M1A1 FEP variant. This difference is a reflection of the development process, which has been characterized by an

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<sup>5</sup> A recent example of this is when the Army's TF 2/7 Cavalry was OPCON to the Marine's 1<sup>st</sup> RCT in Fallujah, but had to reach back to Baghdad for repair parts and supplies.

unofficial spirit of cooperation between the two services, but which does not reflect the reality, i.e., the lack of interoperable equipment in a joint fight. Discussing the logistics of working with the Marines at An Najaf and Fallujah, the then-commander of TF 2/7 quipped, "The only thing the two tanks seem to have common now is the road wheels, and even those may be different!"<sup>6</sup> While the compatibility of parts between the two vehicles is not so drastic, the incident does highlight the potential frustration of a commander who will have to rely on his parent unit for parts because sister service units will not have similar parts to offer in emergency situations. In fact, the Army and Marines no longer wear similar uniforms, so they cannot even share those basic resources if necessary.

As the Army pursues development of the Stryker vehicles, the Future Combat System (FCS), and even a new primary rifle, the interoperability gap threatens to widen. The rapid fielding of non-standardized commercial equipment is also a concern for joint compatibility. Similar concerns exist regarding the acquisition of various communications and information management systems. For example, in Fallujah, the commander and staff of TF 2/7 CAV, which was equipped with FBCB2 and BFT digital CTP systems, struggled to maintain a common tactical picture (CTP)

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<sup>6</sup> Rainey, Lieutenant Colonel James E. *Personal Interview*. November 2005. (Notes in possession of author).

with RCT-1 which used MiRC Chat and C2PC. TF 2/7 also did not have the organic communications assets to coordinate CAS missions provided by Marine aircraft.

To help ameliorate similar difficulties in the future, both services need to do a better job of coordinating acquisition efforts. Despite parochial funding concerns, differences between accountants and leaders are better resolved in the Pentagon than on the battlefield. Realistically, the two services will disagree on the optimization of equipment capabilities from time to time. For example, the Army may never need the AAV or EFV in its inventory, but Army units need to have communications and CTP equipment that can interface with forces in the Marine vehicles.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the answer is not necessarily the joint acquisition of the exact same equipment for all services. What is required is a realistic degree of interoperability between common resources.

Even if the laborious and often incestuous process of acquisition were to ensure the services fielded interoperable equipment, the problem of the source of logistics still remains. A detached tactical unit cannot efficiently rely upon its parent unit for all logistical support. In an environment in which logistic efforts are increasingly targeted by enemy asymmetric

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<sup>7</sup> C2PC has been identified as the basis for the future joint CTP application, but that does not help units deployed in theater now. It also does not address the needs of aviators for the flythrough capabilities of Falconview.

attacks, the current policy is even more dangerous. The enemy views U.S. logistics as a critical vulnerability, and so should U.S. military planners. Joint planners must develop a new construct in defining command relationships that allows the component commander to define the level of logistic support that the gaining unit will provide, including *full* support. Such support may be expressed in progressive levels, or simply defined by the classes of supply and support that the gaining unit will provide.

To facilitate providing this increased level of support to units of different services, compatible logistics architecture must be emplaced. Within the Army, all units use the ULLS automated logistics system.<sup>8</sup> This allows supply and maintenance data to follow a unit when it transfers from one parent unit to another. Within the Marine Corps, no similar standardization exists, and Marine logistics systems interface with Army systems only at echelons above the brigade level. While the two services do not need to adopt the same logistics procedures or automation systems, they do need to develop systems that can interface below the brigade level in order to support a Marine

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<sup>8</sup> The ULLS system provides automated support for supply and maintenance operations. Although a cumbersome DOS-based program, the ULLS system has proven effective and proven the power of a standardized system that has the capability to redirect resources when units change parent organizations. It will eventually be replaced by a newer Windows-based program.



or Army unit transferring its data to a sister service parent unit.<sup>9</sup>

### Training

More important than the quantity or qualities of the equipment that each service employs is the manner in which they employ them. Each service has unique capabilities, and the joint commander must understand these capabilities and how to leverage them. The incoming unit must understand the assets and capabilities that the gaining unit will offer to them as well. For example, the Marines emphasize their infantry capabilities and therefore employ mechanized and armored units differently than the Army.<sup>10</sup> These and other differences in tactics and doctrine must be understood by company grade leaders as well as by field grade leaders.

While joint employment is part of doctrine, sister services rarely train jointly. This must be remedied to increase the efficiency of U.S. forces. Recently, the Joint Chiefs mandated that by FY2009, a training center be developed to facilitate joint training.<sup>11</sup> However, training is needed now, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Funding for supplies ordered by joint units would not be a problem if the automated systems used budget management features. At the DoD and service levels, the automation would still track and report expenses by unit. A gaining unit could not have its budget siphoned by an attached unit.

<sup>10</sup> United States Marine Corps. MCWP 3-12 *Marine Corps Tank Employment*. (Washington D.C.: Department of the Navy, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> Bednarek, Brigadier General Mick, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas P. Odom, and Stephen Florich. "Expanding Jointness at the Joint Readiness Training Center." *CALL-News From the Front*. (JUL-AUG 2005): Available online at <http://www.call.army.mil>

necessary facilities are already in existence and underutilized. The Army maintains the National Training Center (NTC), the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), and the Combined Arms Maneuver Training Center (CMTC). Despite the joint implications of their names, true joint training at these facilities is only a relatively new phenomenon and does not occur as often as necessary. The total combined training centers of the Army, Marines, Air Force, and Navy provide sufficient infrastructure to accomplish the intent of a single "joint" training center. In fact, the multiple sites are more practical as they are available now and allow training in different terrain and different environments.

As with logistics, perhaps the largest hurdle to overcome is the current parochial bureaucracy. Arguments over which service will fund the training and the facilities and what kind of training which should take place should not be a barrier to the essential training of joint forces.

Training must be conducted internally as well as jointly. The Army and Marines use many of the same doctrinal and technical publications, so they have more in common than not. However, the differences must be identified and included in training. The Marines have an advantage in that they attend Army schools in far greater percentages than Army personnel

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attend Marine training. Such training is especially important for officers. This exposes them, at least in the academic setting, to the Army's doctrine and equipment. Unfortunately, insufficient billets at the Marine schools exist to allow for an increase in Army personnel. Hence, those who do return to the Army operating forces from Marine training must share their experiences.

Another way to facilitate internal training and understanding is to create joint billets within Army and Marine tactical units. A Marine officer and staff NCO should be assigned to each brigade headquarters in the Army. Their roles would be to help each brigade develop internal training for joint operations and to facilitate joint training exercises and operations when they do occur. A similar cell of Army personnel should be assigned to each MEU.

In the case of the Marine cell, an ANGLICO team would be an ideal solution, as it could help coordinate Marine and naval air and naval gunfire. As there are currently not enough ANGLICO in the Marines to support this, the cell should at least contain a JTAC. Because the Army traditionally does not do a good job of training maneuver units to employ air and artillery fires, the Marine cell would be invaluable in training Army leaders in these critical skills, and in preparing Army officers to serve as a JTAC (as necessary).

## Conclusion

The Army and Marines have a long and proud history of aiding each other in the defense of the nation. In the continuing Global War against Terrorism, they will continue to fight and work together at a lower tactical level than ever before. However, certain preconditions must exist to make this successful. The two services need to coordinate their logistics and acquisition procedures. They also need to use joint training and joint billets to increase their understanding of one another. These institutional changes will not only make life easier for the tactical commander, but also will increase combat power, and that increases the chances for victory.

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